

# *Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy*

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*When Terry Cook, on behalf of the ACA, invited me to be a plenary speaker at the Banff meeting, I was both delighted and a bit apprehensive. My Canadian colleagues have proven to be valuable but severe critics of my work. Terry suggested that as the theme of the meeting was appraisal, this would be an excellent opportunity for me to speak about documentation strategies and have both the commentator and the audience wrestle with these ideas. I agreed to the proposal.*

*At the same time, I was concluding work on a book entitled Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities, a functional study of colleges and universities intended as an appraisal guide.<sup>1</sup> The introductory essay of that book explains why the new method used in this book — labelled institutional functional analysis — had been developed and how it relates to traditional archival practice. The essay examines problems in modern appraisal practice and makes suggestions for its modification. In preparing my paper for Banff I drew heavily upon this essay as it sums up my thinking about appraisal. As the published text of the ACA presentation, the General Editor has kindly consented to print an edited version of the introductory essay.*

*Because the ACA Conference paper, however, focused on documentation strategies, this version begins with some explanation of that concept and discusses its similarities to and differences from institutional functional analysis. I thank the General Editor for the opportunity to present these ideas more fully in print. My thanks also and especially to Terry Cook for his encouragement and sound advice. And finally, thanks to the ACA for the opportunity to participate in one of the most stimulating archival meetings I have ever attended.*

## **Documentation strategies**

Much has been written and spoken about documentation strategies since the idea was first described in 1986. When first proposed, the concept of documentation strategies generated both scepticism and concern. Questions such as the following were asked: how will the topics be selected and who will be involved? why should the archivist of an institution care about such cooperative projects? how can we afford to carry out

these activities without outside funding? The published literature on the topic,<sup>2</sup> combined with a series of seminars and pilot projects, have clarified the potential usefulness of this concept and begun to suggest how these ideas might enhance archival practice. The questions and concerns that remain may only be resolved when and if several documentation strategies are carried out. This article does not attempt to answer these questions, but dwells instead on the fundamental thesis that underlies this concept: analysis and planning must precede documentary efforts, and institutions must work together because modern documentation crosses institutional lines. I continue to believe that these are the most important and valid ideas about documentation strategies.

The key elements of documentation strategies are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to ensure the adequate documentation of an ongoing issue or activity or geographic area. The strategy is designed, promoted and implemented by records creators, administrators (including archivists) and users. It is an ongoing cooperative effort by many institutions and individuals to ensure the archival retention of appropriate documentation through the application of redefined archival collecting policies, and the development of sufficient resources. The strategy is altered in response to changing conditions and viewpoints.<sup>3</sup>

A strategy is launched by an individual or institution to remedy the poor documentation for a specific sector of society. The institution that launches the effort need not be an archival repository, and the prime mover does not have to be an archivist. Once the topic is identified, advisers and participants are assembled to guide the effort. Creators (legislators, ministers, scientists, administrators), users (historical researchers, lawyers, architects), and custodians of the records (archivists, librarians, museum staff) are needed to provide historical knowledge about the topic and its documentation, and to influence those who create, house and fund archives.

Then research is initiated to achieve an understanding of the phenomenon to be documented and the value and availability of evidence. The use of a variety of analytic techniques provides a fuller knowledge of the history, purposes, functions and special characteristics of the topic of the documentation strategy. With a knowledge of the phenomenon and an understanding of the documentary problems, goals can be formulated to ensure the documentation of the topic. The analyses of the phenomenon and its documentary problems must precede the logistical exercise of determining where the documentation resides and can be retained. The emphasis on cooperation is not, as has been the case in the archival world, an attempt to eliminate competition. Instead, documentation strategies are multi-institutional activities, as they are intended to coordinate and plan the natural dispersion of the integrated documentation of modern society. The headquarters for the documentation strategy monitors the successes and failures of the plan and makes adjustments as needed.

The current project of the Congressional Papers Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists (SAA), on the documentation of the United States Congress, is a very appropriate application of these ideas. The record of the Congress is created by senators, congressmen, congressional aides, committees, the press and many others. These records are eventually dispersed and held by the Congress, the National Archives and numerous other private and public archives that collect and preserve the personal

and professional papers of senators and congressmen. Members of the SAA Roundtable have undertaken an extensive research project to ensure the adequate documentation of Congress. Archivists of government repositories, university special collections and historical societies are working together to study what Congress does (its functions), how it performs its work, and what records are required to document these activities. Their findings will help ensure the coordinated placement and appraisal of these voluminous records.<sup>4</sup>

The intellectual approach that underlies documentation strategies is the same as the newly proposed institutional functional analysis: analysis and planning must precede collecting. The techniques, however, are to be applied at different levels. Documentation strategies are intended to coordinate the collecting activities of many institutions. Institutional functional analysis is intended to be used by individual institutions to improve their own documentation. Documentation strategies and institutional functional analysis are, therefore, separate techniques, but are mutually supportive of one another.

Documentation strategies rely on strong institutional archives: the strategies are *planning and coordinating mechanisms*, not collecting activities. Although documentation strategies can focus on geographic areas, topics or phenomena, the material identified for preservation is not brought together to form artificial collections, but rather preserved in the archives of the institution that created the documentation.

In the course of a documentation strategy for software carried out by the Center for the History of Information Processing of the Charles Babbage Institute, MULTICS was identified as an early development that should be thoroughly documented. As the MULTICS software was developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Babbage asked the Institute Archives at MIT to participate in their project. A search of the published, manuscript and archival holdings determined that the Institute Archives already held some administrative records and published technical reports on this development. The Babbage Institute's interest highlighted the importance of MULTICS to MIT's history and therefore suggested that the documentation should be improved. The staff of the Babbage informed the Institute Archives of the laboratories and individuals who participated in these developments and suggested the specific types of documentation that should be sought from them. The documentation strategy identified the need and the documentation sought, while the institution responded by enhancing their own holdings. Indexes at the Babbage Center inform researchers of the location of materials on software held by many institutions.

In addition, documentation strategies require a thorough knowledge of institutions and their documentation, which is best supplied through a series of functional appraisal studies. Functional studies provide the foundation for both institutional collecting plans and cooperative collecting activities such as documentation strategies. For instance, a documentation strategy for the State of New York can use *Varsity Letters* to analyse and plan the cooperative collecting objectives for higher education in the state. At the same time, SUNY-Albany and Cornell University can use the book to assess their own holdings and devise collecting plans that reflect both their own needs and the documentation objectives and plans of the state.

### ***Rationale for the functional approach***

*Varsity Letters* is a functional study of colleges and universities intended to aid those responsible for the documentation of these institutions. The method used in the book is labelled an institutional functional analysis, and is offered as a new tool to supplement archival practice and revamp it. The premise of the book is that such tools are required to help archivists and their colleagues cope with modern documentary problems.

The volume, duplication, dispersal and transient nature of modern documentation requires a re-examination of archival appraisal theory and practice. New tools are needed to supplement, not supplant, archival practice by supporting the analysis and planning that must precede collecting activities. This work argues that archivists must start their selection activities not with a consideration of specific sets of records, but with an understanding of the context in which records are created: a knowledge of what is to be documented, and the problems of gathering the desired documentation.

A functional approach provides the means to achieve this comprehensive understanding of an institution and its documentation. This knowledge enables the archivist to establish specific documentary goals and collecting plans. It is therefore argued that institutional functional analysis is the appropriate first step for all institutional archivists. It should be understood that although scientists and others use the term functional analysis to refer to specific analytic processes, in this work the term is used more freely to describe the use of functions to structure the study.

*Varsity Letters* is intended for two audiences. First, the work is for archivists, records managers, administrators, historians, librarians and others concerned with documenting modern academic institutions. For this audience the book offers specific advice about the records of modern colleges and universities, and proposes a method to ensure the adequate documentation of these institutions. The volume contains descriptions of the primary functions of colleges and universities, and explores the problems of documenting them.

Second, the work is addressed to those responsible for the documentation of other modern institutions: hospitals, banks, churches, museums, governments. For these readers, the book offers a method to analyse and plan the preservation of records of all types of institutions. This introductory section is directed to the second audience as a means to explore how *Varsity Letters* contributes to archival practice in general, and how the method used in this work can be adapted to meet the documentary needs of other sectors of modern society.

### ***Background***

For the last two decades archivists have criticized the ability of their profession to document modern society. Archivists acknowledge past deficiencies and recognize that the complexity and volume of modern records require new approaches, especially to selection. When F. Gerald Ham explored why archivists carry out their selection responsibilities so badly, he commented, "A handful of critics, however, have suggested that something is fundamentally wrong: our methods are inadequate to achieve our objective, and our passivity and perceptions produce a biased and distorted archival record."<sup>5</sup>

Archivists utilize a body of accepted theory and practice to guide their selection of records. The process of selective retention, known as appraisal, generally emanates from an analysis and evaluation of specific sets of records. Collection by collection<sup>6</sup> selection processes, however, are inadequate and unrealistic in light of the volume of records archivists face. "The size of the annual accumulation of recorded evidence, and the variety of its sources of creation, prohibit archivists, even collectively, from ever coming into contact with all but a tiny percentage of it. ... If somehow archivists could review it all, how much manpower would be required to appraise it, using present approaches?"<sup>7</sup> Archivists use collection policies to articulate the goals of an archival repository and provide the context that guides the selection of individual collections. Generally, however, collection policies are vaguely worded, open-ended statements of goals and are not specific enough to guide selection or documentary activities.

Selection is also guided by archivists' knowledge about their institutions, which is traditionally obtained by reading historical works, studying organization charts, and examining records. *Varsity Letters* supports this focus on institutions but suggests the desirability of starting the selection process with a different set of questions: to focus first not on the specific history, people, events, structure or records of an institution, but with an understanding of what the institution does — what are its functions. A knowledge of the broad range of functions provides the context that is required to support selection and documentary activities. The functional context provides the background information that institutional archivists need to formulate their own collecting policies and select specific collections.

As part of F. Gerald Ham's exhortation to the profession that "conceptualization must precede collection," he asked for

empirical studies on data selection. For example, why don't college and university archivists compare the documentation produced by institutions of higher education with the records universities usually preserve, to discover biases and distortions in the selection process and provide an informed analysis on how archivists should document education and its institutions?"<sup>8</sup>

This book responds to the idea of providing an analysis of the institution and its documentation as the background information needed by archivists to make informed selection decisions. Such an approach is in harmony with Hugh Taylor and Terry Cook who suggest that "the focus of appraisal should shift from the actual record to the conceptual context of its creation, from physical to the intellectual, from matter to mind."<sup>9</sup> *Varsity Letters* attempts to transform these calls for contextual information into an analytic process that can become a part of archival practice. This work offers a means to analyse specific types of institutions, and provide those responsible for their documentation with contextual information to support their selection activities.

### ***Method used***

*Varsity Letters* builds upon and is intended to supplement traditional archival practice. The work uses a functional approach to achieve an understanding of a specific type of institution — colleges and universities — in order to ensure adequate documentation. Archival practice stresses the need to understand institutions, and has used an

examination of functions as a method to achieve this goal. In certain fundamental ways, however, this work departs from traditional archival approaches. It differs in the level at which the functional analysis takes place; the objectives of the analysis; the scope of documentary problems examined; and the role of the archivist in this process.

The introductory chapter, therefore, is devoted to an examination and justification of the different assumptions and approaches taken in the work.

*Varsity Letters* is the second study of modern documentation funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, undertaken by the Institute Archives and Special Collections of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Libraries. The purpose of both studies was not only to prepare useful appraisal guidelines for specific areas, but also to develop better appraisal methods in general. The first project used science and technology as a case study to formulate approaches to the documentation of particular subject areas. *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology: A Guide*,<sup>10</sup> the book produced by that project, presents descriptions of the component activities in the scientific and technological processes. Records are evaluated for the evidence they provide about each activity. The authors hypothesize that their method can be adapted to analyse the records of other subject areas.<sup>11</sup>

Most archivists, however, focus their activities not on a specific subject area, but on the institution they work for. *Varsity Letters* thus studies the documentation of institutions. Colleges and universities were chosen as the case study for this project because they provide a good example of complex modern institutions, and there is a large college and university archival community who can make use of the findings.

### ***Level of analysis***

Professionals as diverse as anthropologists, sociologists and business managers use functional analysis as a descriptive technique to facilitate the examination of patterns across structures and cultures. The archival literature encourages the use of functional analysis, but until recently these proposals had not been developed into accepted procedures. "It is probably more important to relate the records to a particular function than it is to relate them to an organizational component because there may be no relationship between the organization and the function."<sup>12</sup> David Bearman and Richard Lytle's emphasis on the power of provenance is essentially an argument for an emphasis on function. "Functions are independent of organizational structures, more closely related to the significance of documentation than organizational structures, and both finite in number and linguistically simple."<sup>13</sup> Bearman and Lytle argue persuasively for the uses of function, especially for descriptive purposes. *Varsity Letters* demonstrates how a study of functions can support appraisal and documentary activities as well.

Increasingly, archivists are using functional approaches in diverse ways. In *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*, James M. O'Toole examined the functions of records to fulfill basic human motivations to record and document activities.<sup>14</sup> Clark Elliott has examined the function of individual documents.<sup>15</sup> Lytle and Bearman have discussed the functions of both organizations and offices.<sup>16</sup> The MARC-AMC bibliographic record contains a field for information on the function of the office that created the records. While the simultaneous application of functional analysis at all of these different levels may create some confusion, each application is valid and useful.

Functional analysis frees the observer from focusing on particulars, such as the name of the office that created the records, and promotes greater understanding of the purposes for which the records were created. Functional analysis also reveals common patterns that permit comparison across traditional institutional boundaries. It is imperative, however, that the level of application be clear to the reader.

*Varsity Letters* applies a functional approach at an institutional level by asking, "What are the functions of colleges and universities?" This work argues that applying functional analysis at the institutional level is essential to understanding the nature of modern institutions and the broad range of activities that they encompass.

Archival practice has always placed great emphasis on a knowledge of institutions. Archivists study the history and organization of their institutions to help them analyse records, develop institutional collecting policies, and describe their holdings. Formal published histories; organization charts; and volumes of rules, regulations and policies are all used for these investigations. The purpose of such institutional studies is generally to understand a set of records or the activities of a specific office. Archivists have used functional analysis as part of this effort, but the application has been synonymous with a structural analysis. The question archivists have asked is what is the function of a given office?

The traditional focus on administrative structure may be increasingly obsolete in light of the changing nature of modern institutions and their documentation. American appraisal theory and practice were developed at the National Archives and reflect the need to manage the records of hierarchical institutions—specifically the federal government. Though these theories may have been useful to the federal government in the 1930s, they are inadequate for managing the records of complex institutions in the 1990s and beyond.

The size, scope and pace of modern institutions require a new kind of organizational structure. The traditional pyramid with power concentrated in the hands of a few has yielded to organizations "differentiated not vertically, according to rank and role, but flexibly and functionally."<sup>17</sup> Appraisal studies of modern science and technology, business and academe reveal that traditional hierarchical analysis is not applicable where power and decision-making cut through organizations rather than being concentrated at the top. Modern organizational structures are more fluid, responding as needed to changing responsibilities and economic conditions. Automated integrated databases reinforce the need to analyse functions, not administrative structures. The question of which office creates, uses and owns the records must be transformed when many offices enter, alter and share information in a common database. Modern institutions require an alteration in appraisal practice that focuses the analysis on what organizations do rather than who does it.

While the internal structures of modern institutions have altered, so too have the relationships among institutions. Traditional appraisal practice supports the analysis and acquisition of records of individual institutions. Today, however, complex relationships exist among institutions. Government, industry and academe — the private and public sectors — are linked through funding and regulations. Records mirror the society that creates them. Integrated functions affect where and how the records of activities are created and where they are retained.<sup>18</sup> Documentary studies provide greater under-

standing of these related but divided sources, and support coordinated appraisal decisions.

The documentation of modern institutions requires appraisal techniques that reflect their true nature. Rapidly changing organizations demand a mode of analysis that shifts attention from volatile structural issues to more consistent patterns of functions. Appraisal techniques must support analysis of the functions of an institution no matter where they occur — within the organization or outside.

It is for these reasons that the functional analysis in *Varsity Letters* is applied at the institutional level. In this way the study aims to avoid the problems of shifting structures while also broadening the analysis to examine how functions are executed within and outside of official administrative structures. Such an analysis supports an understanding of the multiple actors whose activities need to be documented.

To study the full spectrum of activities that constitute academic institutions, this work examines seven functions: *CONFER CREDENTIALS*, *CONVEY KNOWLEDGE*, *PROMOTE SOCIALIZATION*, *CONDUCT RESEARCH*, *SUSTAIN THEMSELVES*, *PROVIDE PUBLIC SERVICE* and *PROMOTE CULTURE*. The goal was to identify a minimum set of functions that reflected activities at all colleges and universities to one extent or another. These categories and terms were derived from a careful examination of the literature on higher education, and particularly the vocabularies this community uses to describe and evaluate itself. Consideration was also given to the categories and concepts familiar to the archivists responsible for these records. Therefore, the functional terms are in harmony with the way both the higher education and archival communities analyse and describe their universe.

### ***Objectives of the analysis***

What does it take to document an institution? An archivist's response to that question dwells primarily on the analysis and control of institutional records, and the responsibility to assemble and preserve official records. Archival practice focuses attention on the activities and individuals who generate those official records. This emphasis is natural enough, but it runs the risk of narrowing consideration of the scope of activities to be documented and the evidence needed to document the institution. Traditional archival practice can obscure the multiple actors who play roles at all levels of an institution as well as the activities that produce little documentation. Though the care of administrative records may remain the archivist's primary responsibility, there is a danger of equating official administrative records with a full and adequate record of the institution. By looking along rather than across administrative lines, archivists are impeded from achieving a holistic understanding of their institution.

While some institutional archives (because of legal or institutional constraints) confine their activities to the care of official records, other repositories do acquire non-official records for their archives or special collections. There has been a perceived dichotomy between the motivations of institutional archivists and those of special collections curators. College and university archivists/special collections curators acquire faculty papers, records of student clubs, and student "ephemera" for a variety of reasons, if only because they realize that at some level this material contributes to a knowledge of their institution. The acquisition of these non-official materials, however, is often perceived as extraneous to the official documentary responsibility.



An objective of the analysis in *Varsity Letters* is to demonstrate that both official and non-official materials are required to achieve an adequate documentation of an institution. The work tries to merge these perceived disparate approaches by demonstrating how and when both types of records are needed, how they support and complement each other, and therefore why they must be examined in an integrated approach. With the emphasis placed first on what is to be documented — the function — the location of the record (which office or individual actually holds the material) becomes a secondary issue. If the function *CONVEY KNOWLEDGE* (the process of teaching and learning) is to be documented, for example, the archivist must acknowledge that official administrative records offer little understanding of what actually happens in the classroom. The useful documentation that does so resides with the faculty and students.

Functional analysis therefore aims to broaden a sense of the activities and actors that must be documented to achieve a full understanding of the institution. While some of the activities and actors are documented in official records, many others are not. If the breadth of activities that constitute an institution is to be documented, then we must acknowledge that the official administrative record is only a portion of the documentation.

#### ***Appraising in light of future research needs***

There is another way in which archival selection activities can benefit from this broader functional understanding of institutions. This work argues that such a method provides a more useful guide to what should be documented than some of the traditional techniques and values archivists have used. One particular value that needs to be re-examined is the consideration of future research needs when making selection decisions.

Archivists have been directed to plan for the future uses of records when making appraisal judgments. As early as 1963, W. Kaye Lamb called upon archivists to “practice the difficult art of prophecy ... [and] attempt to anticipate needs.”<sup>19</sup> Maynard Brichford has said that “the appraiser should approach records ... evaluating demand as reflected by past, present, and prospective research use. ... The archivist must appraise records that will come into their greatest use in the next two or three generations.”<sup>20</sup> Although we come to our work with varied training, few archivists are skilled soothsayers. Bruce Chatwin wrote in his novel *Utz*, “history is always our guide for the future, and always full of capricious surprises. The future itself is a dead land because it does not yet exist.”<sup>21</sup>

Brichford and others also recommend that archivists use their skill as historians and their knowledge of historical research when they appraise. This is useful advice. William Joyce’s analysis of the research use of archives notes that “whatever the disciplinary affiliation of the academic user of archives, most come to the archives using an historical way of thinking ... and approach their topics with a retrospective or sequential understanding.”<sup>22</sup> Archivists can do a great deal to improve their knowledge of the methods applied by historical researchers: how they frame questions and use sources. Little can be done, however, to anticipate future research trends that alter the questions asked or the use of the documentation. Did archivists anticipate quantitative history, social history, women’s history? No, these all represented new ways of thinking, both for historical researchers and for archivists.

Rather than relying on subjective guesses about potential research, appraisal decisions must be guided by clearer documentary objectives based on a thorough understanding of the phenomenon or institution to be documented. Since archivists cannot predict future research, the best they can do is to document institutions as adequately as possible. A representative record of the full breadth of an institution is the best insurance that future researchers will be able to answer the questions they choose to ask.

Such a record requires that archivists understand and document all facets of their institutions. The functional approach makes this kind of analysis and selection process possible. No analysis or selection process, however, is totally objective. The analytic methods proposed in the book are, of necessity, grounded in current values and perceptions for, like historians, archivists cannot “divest [themselves] of [their] own knowledge and assumptions. ... for everything we see is filtered through present-day mental lenses.”<sup>23</sup>

### ***Scope of documentary problems examined***

The presentation in *Varsity Letters* places equal emphasis on descriptions of the functions and on analyses of the problems associated with documenting them. The approach taken in these analyses differs from usual archival practice in two important ways: first, the evidence examined as potential sources includes not only archival and manuscript but also published, visual and artifactual materials; secondly, the documentary problems examined include not only managing abundant records but also responding to the scarcity or absence of documentation for some functions.

Information about modern society exists in many media: unpublished, published, visual, aural and artifactual sources all provide parts of the total documentary record. Archivists are not responsible for the preservation of all media, but they must be aware of other types of evidence as they make selections. For example, scientific journals and reports are preserved in a library, but archivists should understand the general role and content of this literature as they select manuscript and archival records to complement the published documentation.<sup>24</sup>

The modern documentary record reflects the changing nature of modern communication. Arthur Schlesinger commented, “In the last three quarters of a century, the rise of the typewriter has vastly increased the flow of paper, while the rise of the telephone has vastly reduced its importance.”<sup>25</sup> Since Schlesinger made these comments in 1967, the copy machine has increased the paper flow, while electronic mail and database systems have further altered our means of communication. Archivists acknowledge that these developments create significant alterations in the documentary record.

The record is affected not only by technology but also by the very nature of human activity. While many human endeavours produce records as a natural by-product, other activities leave no tangible evidence. Colleges and universities create many formal records as they examine and alter their curriculum, but the actual teaching, learning and socialization processes often leave few records. Yet these are vitally important activities. Such documentation techniques as oral history and photography are used occasionally by archivists, historians and others, who recognize that the written record is incomplete. Although archivists acknowledge the deficiencies of modern records,

they have not systematically included the analysis of these deficiencies among their tasks, nor initiated activities to fill in these gaps.

Archival and records management techniques focus attention on the management of records. The archivist's problem is perceived as controlling the abundance of modern records and selecting that small percentage of documentation that should go to the archives. The documentary analysis in this work suggests that there are other documentary problems for the archivist to address as well, including the problems associated with technological change and the scarcity or even absence of documentation.

### ***Quality vs. quantity***

Primarily, however, this work supports the process of selecting evidence from existing sources. The purpose of the documentary analysis in *Varsity Letters* is to understand the available forms of evidence so that their relative worth can be evaluated. These evaluations should not only help archivists make selection decisions but also provide qualitative measures to support the reappraisal of collections already in archival repositories.

In recent years archivists have begun to use collection analysis to test the effectiveness of their acquisition policies and practices. Survey techniques are used to evaluate the holdings of a specific repository and develop more detailed collecting objectives. Collection assessment projects at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Bentley Library at the University of Michigan and the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota all provide useful models of these efforts.<sup>26</sup> In each case, appropriate lists of subjects or topical areas were used to guide the evaluation of the holdings. Descriptive controls and the records themselves were examined to assess the subject strengths of the holdings. The difficulty with the existing collection analysis process is that it supports primarily a quantitative, not a qualitative analysis of the holdings. Lacking sufficient knowledge about the nature and value of evidence, archivists can only assess the amount of material assembled on a specific topic, and not the potential value of the evidence to support research.

The assessment project at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, for example, only partially confirmed the impression that their holdings are a rich source of information about religion. The survey found a considerable quantity of records documenting religious activities, but closer examination revealed that the records came from only three denominations and that 90 per cent of them were baptismal and marriage records. These records contribute very important pieces of specific information, but they fail to document fully the religious experience in Wisconsin.

The documentary efforts of archivists often proceed directly from defining a topic to be documented to a survey in order to determine what records are available. Rather than asking what exists, the question that needs to be addressed is what is the value of the available information to provide evidence about the phenomenon. Information exists in many forms and the sum total comprises an integrated record. An evaluation of each form of evidence determines its particular value in relationship to the other forms of information.

In the last decade the archival profession has benefited from numerous projects that have examined the nature of documentary evidence. These studies demonstrate that the potential value of records is best understood by examining their creation and original

use, and their relationship to other evidence. While the National Archives study of the FBI records, the Massachusetts study of judicial records, and the more recent RAMP study of case files by Terry Cook<sup>27</sup> follow a long tradition of examining particular types of records, the archival community has also begun to produce new studies that focus on the documentation of specific topical areas and types of institutions.

*Understanding Progress as Progress, Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology* and *The High-Technology Company: A Historical Research and Archival Guide*, and the reports of the Center for History of Physics of the American Institute of Physics, study the nature of scientific and technological documentation by examining the institutions and activities that generate the records.<sup>28</sup> The study of the records of Congress being conducted by the Society of American Archivists' Congressional Papers Roundtable, and the study of the health care industry directed by Joan Krizack, will support archivists' ability to document these sectors of society by providing information about these institutions and their documentary problems.<sup>29</sup> All of these studies have taken essentially functional approaches that aim to examine the nature of a specific institution or phenomenon, and the nature of the evidence of that institution or phenomenon. By examining the evidence — whether published, manuscript, visual or artifactual — in relationship to the activities that are to be documented, the quality of the potential evidence is assessed. The studies of science and technology, for instance, evaluate the role and worth of the published scientific and technical report literature and describe the particular types of archival and manuscript evidence that are needed to document the scientific process more fully. The functional descriptions in *Varsity Letters* clarify the activities to be documented, while the documentary analyses assess the ability of the available evidence to provide adequate information. The finances section of the *SUSTAIN* function, for example, first evaluates published financial reports as sources of information and then identifies the key records that are needed to complement and supplement those reports.

Understanding the nature of the function or activity to be documented supports the evaluation of the evidence to provide useful information. The integrated analysis of the available evidence supports the evaluation of the relative worth of each source. A greater understanding of the relative value of the evidence supports the qualitative re-evaluation of collections already in archival repositories, the establishment of planned collecting efforts, and more informed selection decisions about individual collections.

### ***Role of the archivist***

Lacking analytical methods that provide an understanding about institutions, archivists focus on the records themselves. The records, not the institution, become the guiding force, and the archival record becomes synonymous with the documentation of the institution. The archivist's task becomes the management of existing records rather than the assembly of an adequate documentation for an institution. Records management and survey techniques are relied upon to manage the voluminous records generated by modern society. The dictum to study institutions and appraise records in light of the total documentation translates all too frequently into a records survey which, as F. Gerald Ham pointed out, "is a logistical device we often mistake for an acquisition strategy."<sup>30</sup> Surveys simply uncover what records exist, and the end product is generally

a plan to manage those records. A survey does not indicate what material is actually needed to document the institution.

Is the archivist's responsibility to manage existing records, or to play a role in ensuring the adequate documentation of the institution? The approach taken in this work suggests a larger, more active role for archivists. To meet the challenges posed by modern documentation, archivists and their colleagues must become active participants in the creation, analysis and selection of the documentary record. This places archivists, librarians, and others in the role of documenters of their institutions, rather than simply the keepers of its records.

To be a documenter requires a comprehensive understanding of the institution to be documented and the nature of its documentary problems. A functional study of an institution supports the examination of all its activities, and therefore encourages the documentation of the full multiplicity of activities that make up modern institutions. A functional understanding of an institution helps the archivist select wisely from the abundant records, while planning appropriate strategies to document those functions that create few records.

Archivists have conflicting reactions, however, to activities that engage them in the creation of records. Since the early 1970s, when Howard Zinn challenged the profession to relinquish their passive "keeper" mentality and become "activist archivists," there have been debates about such interventionist roles. Archivists acknowledge the desirability of using records management techniques to control aspects of the creation and retention of records. Electronic records have also forced the profession to face the necessity of intervening at the creation of these records to ensure that they will exist and continue to be useful. Archivists are more ambivalent about their appropriate role in creating documentation when otherwise it would not exist. They recognize and accept that certain phenomena will not be documented without active intervention. An archival record of a dance company requires the creation of a moving image record of the dances. A more durable record of a culture that uses oral tradition will only be captured if visual and aural records are deliberately created.

While archivists have come to acknowledge and participate in such documentary activities, a similar professional consensus has not emerged about the legitimacy and even necessity of these activities as a regular part of the responsibility of any institutional archivist. As archival practice focuses primarily on activities that produce records, the documentation of activities that do not normally create or leave records is not an integrated and accepted activity. Yet, if archivists perceive their responsibility as documenting an institution, then the intervention to create or ensure the creation of records must also be an integrated part of their documentary activities.

Archivists, however, need not be the people who actually create records. Their most important roles are as analyst, planner and agent who create an awareness about documentary problems. Archivists can then work knowledgeably with appropriate individuals to carry out oral history, photographic, video or other documentary activities as needed. To achieve this, archivists must do archival research sufficient to articulate a coherent documentary plan. Archival research must not be confused with historical research. The goal of archival research is to understand the nature of an institution and its documentary problems. Historical research, on the other hand, is a process of answering specific questions through the interpretation of sources.

### ***Relationship to archival practice***

To conclude this examination of how *Varsity Letters* relates to archival practice, it is appropriate to return to the fundamental concepts that guide archival activities, such as provenance. How does this work relate to these and other basic concepts? How and where do archivists utilize these traditional archival principles, and when do they use this work?

The central chapters of the book present descriptions of the functions that make up academic institutions. These functional presentations describe the potential full range of activities at colleges and universities. Clearly, these functions manifest themselves differently at each campus. The elements that constitute the *SOCIALIZE* function will be different at commuting and residential campuses. The scope of *RESEARCH* differs at a research university such as MIT, a liberal arts college such as Swarthmore, and a community college. The complexity of managing an institution that enrolls 50,000 students makes the *SUSTAIN* function different from that of a college that enrolls 5,000.

All college and university archivists who want to use this book must translate these general functional descriptions so that they are applicable to their institutions. The Institutional Documentation Plan at the end of the volume is intended to guide archivists through that translation process, and assist them in preparing a detailed documentation plan that is appropriate to meet the needs of their institution. The translation process utilizes traditional archival techniques such as administrative histories and collection analysis. Vital to this process is the archivist's knowledge of the concept of provenance.

The translation process begins by studying each function and evaluating its importance to the institution through historical investigations. The result of these studies is a clear understanding of what is to be documented and what documentation is sought. The challenge is then to locate that documentation. For the archivist, that problem requires an additional translation process to determine who created the documentation, and therefore where it must be sought. The preparation of administrative histories guides the archivist through this process. Fundamental to this activity, then, is the understanding of the principles of provenance that relies on a knowledge of the office which created the records as a means to locate, arrange and describe them. The functional analyses provide the understanding of why specific documentation is sought. Archival principles determine how those records are located, arranged and described.

### ***How to adapt this work for other institutional types***

Functional guides are a new tool intended to help archivists and their colleagues provide background knowledge of the phenomenon to be documented, and guide their archival activities. Functional studies are seen as critical to archival practice, as their findings support all levels of activities from the selection of individual collections to cooperative documentation strategies involving many institutions.

It is the premise of the work that this method can be replicated to provide functional descriptions of many other institutional types. If this test case is successful and proves useful, archivists can adapt the functional appraisal process to other types of institutions—hospitals, museums, banks, courts, churches and businesses. Seven

functions are described in this study as comprising the activities of colleges and universities. A similar list could be developed for any other type of institution.

While certain functions, such as *SUSTAIN THEMSELVES* and *PROMOTE SOCIALIZATION*, will apply to many institutions, some functions must be altered to reflect the specific nature of an institution. For instance, while a functional list for a religious institution might include *SUSTAIN* and *SOCIALIZE*, sanctify, evangelize, maintain tradition and minister are functions unique to religious institutions.<sup>31</sup> It might also be possible to produce a generalized list of functions that each institutional type could adapt to its setting. Using this functional method, a series of institutional guides could be produced to support the documentary activities of the archival and historical communities. These guides would support the activities of each institution to document itself, and also support cooperative collecting activities, such as documentation strategies, by providing information about the nature of institutions and their documentation.

The author hopes that *Varsity Letters* will be accepted as a useful addition to archival practice and that colleagues will develop functional guides for other institutions that are vital to modern society.

### Notes

1. Helen W. Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press; Chicago: Society of American Archivists, forthcoming), introductory essay.
2. Helen W. Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 109-124; Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 12-47; Philip N. Alexander and Helen W. Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," *American Archivist* (50) (Fall 1987): 518-531; and Richard J. Cox, "A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 192-200.
3. This definition is based on the original version included in the Samuels and Hackman articles cited above and revised by Samuels, Richard J. Cox, and Tim Ericson in 1989.
4. Karen Paul, et al., *Congressional Documentation Project Report* to be published by the U.S. Senate, Spring 1992.
5. F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38, no. 1 (January 1975): 5.
6. Canadian and American use of the term 'collection' varies, with the Canadians sticking more closely to the concept that a collection is an artificial assemblage. In this article, however, the author deliberately chose more general terminology that is less heavily weighted by traditional archival interpretation. 'Collection' is used here only to refer to natural accumulations: archival and manuscript fonds.
7. David Bearman, "Archival Methods", *Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1989), 9.
8. Ham, "The Archival Edge," 12.
9. Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in *Festschrift for Hugh Taylor* [to be published by the Association of Canadian Archivists in 1992].
10. Joan K. Haas, Helen Willa Samuels and Barbara Trippel Simmons, *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology: A Guide* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985; distributed by the Society of American Archivists).
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13. David Bearman and Richard Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-1986): 22.
14. James M. O'Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, 1990), 10-13.
15. Clark A. Elliott, "Communication and Events in History: Toward a Theory for Documenting the Past," *American Archivist* 48, no. 4 (Fall 1985): 357-368.
16. Bearman and Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance."
17. Warren Bennis, quoted in Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York, 1971), 144.
18. Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," pp. 109-124.
19. W. Kaye Lamb, "The Archivist and the Historian," *American Historical Review* 68 (January 1963): 385.
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21. Bruce Chatwin, *Utz* (New York, 1989), 119.
22. William L. Joyce, "Archivists and Research Use," *American Archivist* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 131.
23. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), 216.
24. Haas, Samuels, Simmons, *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology*, 69-76.
25. Arthur Schlesinger quoted in Ham, "The Archival Edge," 15.
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27. National Archives and Records Service, *Appraisal of the Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation* (Washington, D.C., 1981); Michael S. Hindus, *The File for the Massachusetts Superior Court, 1859-1959: An Analysis and Plan for Action* (Boston, 1980); Terry Cook, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information A RAMP Study with Guidelines* (Paris 1992).
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29. Paul, et al., *Congressional Documentation Project Report*; Joan Krizack, *The NHPRG Health Care Records Project Report* [forthcoming].
30. Ham, "The Archival Edge."
31. This list of functions was suggested by Beth Yakel.